

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W

----- 076357

R 250620Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6496

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

USINT BAGHDAD

USINT DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 JIDDA 1471

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SA

SUBJECT: SAUDI ARABIA'S POLITICAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

REF: (A) A-94 OF 9/26/73; (B) JIDDA 2763 OF 8/24/72;

(C) JIDDA'S A-122 OF 6/3/70;

D) A-82 OF 4/15/70

SUMMARY: DURING A MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR AKINS MARCH 21,
MINISTER OF INTERIOR PRINCE FAHD INDICATED A FIFTY OR
SIXTY-MEMBER CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY MIGHT BE APPOINTED SOON.
ASSEMBLY WOULD HAVE ADVISORY AND LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY
TO COMPLEMENT EXECUTIVE ROLE OF COUNCIL OF MINISTERS.
ASSEMBLY MEMBERS WOULD INITIALLY BE APPOINTED BY FAHD,
BUT IN FUTURE COULD BE CHOSEN VIA POPULAR ELECTIONS FROM
LARGER LISTS OF FOUR HUNDRED CANDIDATES ALSO SELECTED BY

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PRINCE. PRINCE BELIEVES A FORMAL CONSITUTION SHOULD BE

DRAWN UP FOR SAUDI ARABIA, SINCE KORAN TEACHINGS ARE NOT DIRECTLY APPLICABLE TO MANY MODERN VAKCUMSTANCES. LAW OF PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION SHOULD LIKEWISE BE PROMULGATED. PRINCE SPOKE WITH EXTRAORDINARY AUTHORITY; HIS REMARKS ON CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY ARE FIRST IN SEVERAL YEARS AND DIFFER IN TONE AND NATURE FROM HIS EARLIER AND INCLUSIVE STATEMENTS SAME TOPIC. DISCUSSION SUGGESTS FAHD AND HIS SUPPORTERS MAY BE ADOPTING A MORE ASSERTIVE POSITION IN SAG AGAINST DAY WHEN POWER SLIPS FROM HANDS OF KING FAISAL. (A HAND-PICKED CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE HELPFUL TO PRINCE IN A SUCCESSION SITUATION.) PRINCE SAID PRESS OF BUSINESS WOULD MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO CONSIDER ANY FOREIGN TRAVEL UNTIL MONTH OF MAY; PERHAPS SOMETHING MAY BE ANNOUNCED ON CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY BETWEEN NOW AND THEN. END SUMMARY.

1. ON THURSDAY, MARCH 21, AMBASSADOR AKINS, ACCOMPANIED BY DCM HORAN, CALLED ON MINISTER OF INTERIOR PRINCE FAHD BIN ABD AL-AZIZ IN RIYADH. PRINCE ARRIVED SOME FIFTEEN MINUTES LATE FOR MEETING, AND APOLOGIZED TO AMBASSADOR, SAYING HE HAD JUST COMPLETED SOME CONSULTATIONS WITH KING FAISAL. ALMOST IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER, FAHD PROCEEDED TO GIVE AMBASSADOR HIS VIEWS ON THE DIRECTION IN WHICH SAUDI ARABIA'S POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT SHOULD GO.

2. FAHD WAS PLEASED ABOUT THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN SAUDI ARABIA TODAY. HE SAID SAUDIS WERE FORTUNATE TO ENJOY A DEGREE OF ECONOMIC AND PERSONAL FREEDOM THAT WAS ALMOST UNMATCHED IN THE ARAB WORLD. YOUNG SAUDIS, MOREOVER, ARE PARTICULARLY AWARE OF THEIR GOOD FURTUNE BY THE COMPARISONS THAT RECENT HISTORY AFFORDS BETWEEN SAG AND NEIGHBORING REGIMES, WHERE THE TERM "FREEDOM" OR "THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE" USUALLY STANDS FOR SOMETHING LIKE ITS OPPOSITE. AT THE SAME TIME, FAHD NOTED THAT THE EXPERIENCE OF CERTAIN QUASI-PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENTS IN THE ARAB WORLD ALSO WAS NOT ENTIRELY HAPPY. IN PARTICULAR, HE WAS CONCERNED THAT THE PREMATURE EXPERIMENTS OF KUWAIT AND BAHRAIN WITH PARLIAMENTS AND LOCAL ELECTIONS MIGHT MAKE CONSTRUCTIVE AND RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT MORE DIFFICULT.

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3. FAHD ASKED RHETORICALLY, "WHAT WOULD BE BEST FOR SAUDI ARABIA?" HE FOUND NO MERIT IN THE IDEA OF AN ELECTED PARLIAMENT FOR SAUDI ARABIA. SHOULD IT BE ATTEMPTED, THE SO-CALLED PARLIAMENT WOULD BE FILLED BY REPRESENTATIVES OF TRIBES AND URBAN GROUPINGS WHO MIGHT BE ILLITERATE AND ALMOST CERTAINLY WOULD LACK THE VISION AND GRASP OF AFFAIRS NEEDED TO ASSURE SAUDI ARABIA'S

PROPER DEVELOPMENT. ONLY TROUBLE COULD RESULT IF SAUDI ARABIA TODAY WERE TO SET UP THE FORMS OF PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS. THE SAUDI PUBLIC, HE SAID, NEEDED TO BE GUIDED AND EDUCATED BEFORE IT COULD HANDLE SUCH UNFAMILIAR MODES OF GOVERNMENT.

4. AS A FIRST STEP IN EVOLUTION OF SAUDI ARABIA'S GOVERNING INSTITUTIONS, PRINCE FAHD WAS CURRENTLY WORKING ON A CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY (MAJLIS AL-SHURA). FAHD HOPED THIS BODY WOULD BE SET UP SHORTLY, AND SAID IT WOULD CONSIST OF FIFTY TO SIXTY MEMBERS TO BE CHOSEN BY HIM. IT WOULD FUNCTION AS THE LEGISLATIVE AND ADVISORY BODY OF THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT, AND THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS WOULD BECOME MORE SPECIFICALLY THE GOVERNMENT'S EXECUTIVE ARM.

5. AFTER THE CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY HAD BECOME AN ESTABLISHED, FUNCTIONING INSTITUTION, PRINCE FAHD BELIEVED A NEXT STEP MIGHT BE FOR HIM TO NAME 400 CANDIDATES TO THE COUNCIL. THE PUBLIC WOULD THEN BE ALLOWED TO CHOOSE VIA ELECTIONS WHICH OF THESE CANDIDATES THEY WANTED TO REPRESENT THEM ON THE CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY.

6. ANOTHER NEEDED INSTITUTIONAL REFORM WAS PROMULGATION OF THE LAW OF REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION (NIZAM AL MUQAATA'AAT). THE INTEREST OF SAUDI CITIZENS INTO

SOCIETY WOULD BE FURTHERED IF THEY WERE CONSCIOUS THEY HAD A PROXIMATE ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER -WITH REAL AUTHORITY-TOWHICH THEY COULD DIRECT REQUESTS AND COMPLAINTS.

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AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
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AMEMBASSY MANAMA
AMEMBASSY SANAA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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7. PRINCE FAHD ALSO BELIEVED THAT WORK SHOULD COMMENCE FAIRLY SOON ON DRAFTING A CONSTITUTION FOR SAUDI ARABIA. HE NOTED AND DISMISSED THE CLAIM THAT THE KORAN IS THE ONLY CONSTITUTION SAUDI ARABIA NEEDS: THE TEACHINGS OF THE KORAN WERE OFTEN NOT DIRECTLY APPLICABLE TO MODERN SITUATIONS. IT SHOULD BE REGARDED PRIMARILY AS A DOCUMENT THAT WAS SPIRITUALLY BINDING ON ALL MUSLIMS AND NOT AS A SECULAR LUEPRINT FOR ANY SINGLE NATIONAL GROUPING OF THEM. YOUNG SAUDIS WOULD HAVE A MORE CLEAR AND SELF-CONSCIOUS PERCEPTION OF THEIR GOVERNMENT IF IT WERE DEFINED AND ORGANIZED BY THE NUMBERED PARAGRAPHS IN A CONSTITUTION.

8. COMMENT: THROUGHOUT THE MEETING FAHD SPOKE WITH UNPRECEDENTED EMPHASIS AND AUTHORITY. WITHOUT SAYING SO SPECIFICALLY, HE GAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT HE HAD DISCUSSED THESE MATTERS WITH THE KING AND THAT THEY HAD ROYAL
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APPROVAL. THE PROPOSALS WOULD BE SIGNIFICANT IN THEMSELVES, BUT IT IS NOTEWORTHY ALSO THAT FAHD MADE CLEAR THAT THEY REPRESENTED HIS OWN POLITICAL PROGRAM. FAHD HAS PREVIOUSLY BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH PROPOSALS CONCERNING THE CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY (REFS B AND C), BUT NOT IN A WAY TO PROVIDE MUCH ENCOURAGEMENT EITHER FOR MODERNISTS OR HIS OWN SUPPORTERS IN SAUDI ARABIA. (HIS 1970 INTERVIEW WITH A SAUDI JOURNALIST ABOUT THE CONSTITUTIONAL FUTURE OF SAUDI ARABIA, LED TO THE JOURNALIST'S IMPRISONMENT FOR PUBLISHING THE STORY -- REFS C AND D. FAHD'S PRESTIGE SUFFERED FOR HAVING ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE CAUGHT IN PUBLIC IN A POSITION UNDOUBTEDLY IN ADVANCE OF THE KING'S.) FAHD, HOWEVER, NOW APPEARS TO BE ASSERTING HIMSELF ON MAJOR POLICY ISSUES WHICH UNDOUBTEDLY WILL EXTEND BEYOND THE TIME THAT POLITICAL POWER WILL PASS FROM KING FAISAL TO A SUCCESSOR. (A HAND-PICKED CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY WOULD STRENGTHEN FAHD'S LEGAL AND MORAL POSITION IN A POST-FAISAL SITUATION.)

9. AT ANOTHER POINT IN THE DISCUSSION (SEPTTEL) FAHD
SAID HE COULD NOT CONSIDER ANY FOREIGN TRAVEL UNTIL
MAY. PERHAPS MORE WILL BE HEARD ON THE CONSULTATIVE
ASSEMBLY BETWEEN NOW AND THEN?
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